

Message Text

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R 051907Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2518
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
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USMISSION EC BRUSSELS
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PARIS 13359

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, FR, PGOV
SUBJECT: FRENCH INTERNAL POLITICAL SCENE -- APRIL 1977

SUMMARY: APRIL WAS NOT FRANCE'S CRUELEST MONTH; IT WASN'T EVEN CRUEL -- IT WAS JUST A DEPRESSING EXAMPLE OF POOR MAJORITY POLITICS. A STEADILY MOUNTING WAVE OF MALAISE IN THE GOVERNMENT MAJORITY, LESS UNITED THAN EVER, WAS MATCHED ONLY BY THE SPECTACLE OF A UNITED LEFT OPPOSITION CAREFULLY AVOIDING ALL POSSIBLE ARENAS FOR PUBLIC DISSENT. IF THERE IS SUCH A THING AS THE PUBLIC MOOD, IT APPEARS TO HAVE ENTERED A PERIOD OF INCERTITUDE BROUGHT ON BY

- EVIDENCE (IN THE FORM OF AN ANNOUNCED 0.9 PERCENT PRICE RISE FOR MARCH, WITH AN EVEN SHARPER RISE EXPECTED IN APRIL) THAT THE BARRE PLAN MAY NOT BE WORKING AS WELL AS SOME HAD HOPED;
- LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN THE ABILITY OF THE GOF (BARRE-BIS) TO CHANGE THAT SITUATION;
- SEEMING GOVERNMENT VACILLATION AT A TIME WHEN MANY FRENCHMEN APPEAR TO WANT STRONG LEADERSHIP FROM THE MAJORITY IN THE FACE OF RISING LEFT STRENGTH;
- STRIKES WHICH BROUGHT HOME THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION NOT TO INCREASE ITS OFFERS TO THE MAJOR UNIONS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR COULD AFFECT EVERYONE'S DAILY LIFE. END

SUMMARY.

1. LOOKING FORWARD -- THE LEFT: WITH THE UNITED LEFT SUMMIT ONLY TWO WEEKS AWAY AT MONTH'S END, THE THREE MAJOR OPPOSITION PARTIES HAVE BEEN CONDUCTING THEIR CONFIDENTIAL

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NEGOTIATIONS AIMED AT UPDATING THE COMMON PROGRAM. HELD IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF UNUSUAL SECRECY (THERE HAVE BEEN VIRTUALLY NO LEAKS) AND WITH NO PUBLIC APPEARANCE OF ACRIMONY, THESE NEGOTIATIONS HAVE IMPRESSED MANY PS OFFICIALS, WHO HAD FEARED THE WORST, WITH THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE PCF SEEKS PROGRAMMATIC CHANGE RATHER THAN THE EXCUSE FOR PUBLIC CASTIGATION OF THE PS. THE ISSUES, RANGING FROM DETAILED DISCUSSIONS OF ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL REALITIES NEW TO FRANCE SINCE THE 1972 COMMON PROGRAM WAS SIGNED TO VAST GENERAL IDEOLOGICAL DEBATES, WILL MERELY UPDATE THE SHOPWORN COMMON PROGRAM. FOR THE TIME BEING, MOST SOCIALISTS, WHILE ADMITTING THAT THEY ARE WAITING FOR THE OTHER SHOE TO DROP, BELIEVE THAT PCF REASONABLENESS IS BASED ON

- THE FACT THAT THE PCF DID LESS WELL, IN BOTH ABSOLUTE AND RELATIVE TERMS, IN THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN MARCH THAN IT HAD EXPECTED;
- PCF BELIEF THAT NEW POLLS WILL SHOW THE UNITED LEFT TO BE A RELATIVELY EASY WINNER SHOULD

ELECTIONS BE HELD NOW;

-- A CONCURRENT DESIRE TO AVOID ANY ACTION WHICH
MIGHT KEEP THE UNITED LEFT OUT OF POWER (WHICH
THE PS READS AS FURTHER PROOF OF PCF COMMITMENT
TO PARTICIPATE FULLY IN A LEFT GOVERNMENT).

WHILE WE DO NOT CLAIM TO HAVE AN INSIDE TRACK TO THE
PCF/PS/LEFT RADICAL NEGOTIATIONS, SOME MAJOR CONCLUSIONS
CAN NOW BE DRAWN:

-- FOREIGN POLICY, EXCEPT IN THE ECONOMIC SPHERE,
WILL BE EVEN MORE NEGLECTED IN THE UPDATE THAN
IT WAS IN THE ORIGINAL COMMON PROGRAM;

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-- MITTERRAND WILL NOT ALLOW THE PS TO ASSUME ANY
FURTHER IDEOLOGICAL BAGGAGE WHICH MIGHT ENCUM-
BER IT IN THE ELECTIONS -- SPECIFICALLY, THIS
MEANS THAT HE WILL CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN A DELI-
BERATE AMBIGUITY ON ISSUES SUCH AS WORKER
MANAGEMENT AND REIMBURSEMENT FOR THE SHARE-
HOLDERS OF NATIONALIZED INDUSTRIES;
-- THE PS WILL SEEK TO REASSURE THE BUSINESS
COMMUNITY TO THE MAXIMUM EXTENT WHICH THE
PC ALLOWS.

2. THE SOCIALISTS -- LOOKING FOR UNITY? PREOCCUPYING
MITTERRAND'S PS MAJORITY IN APRIL WAS THE PROBLEM OF
THE PARTY'S LEFT WING CERES. AS THE PS PREPARES FOR ITS
JUNE 17 CONGRESS AT NANTES, THE LINES OF BATTLE BETWEEN
PS MAJORITY AND CERES ARE BECOMING CLARIFIED.
MITTERRAND'S POSITION IS SIMPLE: EITHER THE CERES CEA-
SES TO ACT LIKE WHAT HE CALLS "A PARTY WITHIN THE
PARTY" (READ: CEASES TO PUBLISH INDEPENDENT POSITION
PAPERS, CEASES TO RUN A PARALLEL ORGANIZATION TO THAT
OF THE PARTY MAJORITY) OR HE WILL TRY TO READ IT OUT
OF THE PS. CERES, ON THE OTHER HAND, KEEPS REMINDING
MITTERRAND THAT HE IS THE PARTY'S FIRST SECRETARY ONLY
THANKS TO CERES VOTES AT THE 1971 CONGRESS OF EPINAY,
THAT IT WAS THE CERES WHICH WAS THE FIRST TO AGITATE FOR
A COMMON PROGRAM OF THE LEFT AND THAT CERES CANDIDATES
RAN VERY WELL IN THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, BUT THAT'S
WINDOW-DRESSING: CERES' REAL POINT POSES THE ESSENTIAL
DILEMMA OF TODAY'S PS AND TOMORROW'S LEFT GOVERNMENT:
IS THE PS TO BECOME A SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY WHICH NO
LONGER HEEDS THE LESSONS OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION
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FOR ALL FACTIONS WITHIN IT OR WILL IT MAINTAIN ITS PRESENT MULTI-FACETED ORGANIZATION WITH ALL OF THE APPEARANCES AND REALITIES OF DIVISION WHICH THAT ENTAILS? MITTERRAND KNOWS THAT IN THE FIRST COURSE LIES ELECTORAL HEALTH; HE FEARS THAT IN THE SECOND LIES GOVERNMENTAL SUICIDE. THE SPECIFIC ISSUES WHICH DIVIDE THE TWO GROUPS WITHIN THE PS ARE LEGION AND RELATIVELY BORING; THE QUESTIONS WHICH CERES POSES AT A MACRO-POLITICAL LEVEL ARE MORE INTERESTING:

- IS THE PS, UNDER MITTERRAND'S RULE, TO BECOME A PARTY WHICH PAYS LIP SERVICE TO ITS FACTIONS WHILE IN REALITY ENFORCING A UNITY OF VIEW WHICH REMINDS SOME OBSERVERS OF THE PCF'S DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM?
- IS MITTERRAND SEEKING TO ARRIVE IN GOVERNMENT AS A JACOBIN AND CENTRALIZER, AFRAID OF LETTING THE REGIONS, INTEREST GROUPS AND FACTIONS EXPRESS THEMSELVES?
- IF SO, WHAT ROLE CAN THE CERES, WHOSE GREATEST SUCCESS IN THE LAST THREE YEARS HAS BEEN TO BRING THE PS AS A WHOLE TO ACCEPT THE IDEA OF WORKER MANAGEMENT ("AUTOGESTION"), PLAY?

CURRENT BETTING IS THAT MITTERRAND WILL IN FACT SUCCEED IN ENFORCING PARTY DISCIPLINE, BUT THE PRICE THAT HE MAY HAVE TO PAY COULD INCLUDE READING THE CERES, CURRENTLY ESTIMATED AT 25 PERCENT OF PS STRENGTH, OUT OF THE PARTY.

3. THE COMMUNISTS - EUROCOMMUNISM: FOR ALL THE REASONS NOTED IN PARA 1 ABOVE, APRIL WAS LOW PROFILE MONTH FOR THE PCF ON THE DOMESTIC FRONT. WHILE THE PARTY WAS CERTAINLY INSTRUMENTAL IN STRIKES, DEMONSTRATIONS AND OTHER JOB ACTIONS (SEE PARIS 12857 AND PARIS 12698), IT HAD THE CGT CARRY THE INSTEAD, PCF INTEREST IN APRIL TURNED TO TWO FOREIGN POLICY EXERCISES. THE FIRST (SEE PARIS 11554) SAW THE

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PARTY RECEIVE PORTUGUESE COMMUNIST LEADER ALVARO CUNHAL FOR THREE DAYS OF RELATIVELY DISCREET DISCUSSIONS. THE SECOND AND BY FAR THE MORE IMPORTANT OF THE TWO, SENT GEORGES MARCHAIS TO ROME FOR FOUR DAYS OF DISCUSSIONS WITH ENRICO BERLINGUER OVER THE FUTURE, AS THE PCF PORTENTOUSLY ANNOUNCED "FRANCO-ITALIAN STATE-TO-STATE RELATIONS." SOME OF THE PCF'S MAJOR OBJECTIVES ARE ALREADY BECOMING VISIBLE. THE PCF WANTS TO STAKE OUT AN INDEPENDENT ROLE FOR ITSELF IN STATE-TO-STATE RELATIONS, A ROLE WHICH IT HAS HITHERTO ENJOYED ONLY AS A

PRIVILEGED INTERLOCUTOR OF THE EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. IT ALSO WANTS TO AVOID THE IMPRESSION THAT IT IS CEDING THE PROBLEM OF FOREIGN RELATIONS TO THE PS, AN IMPRESSION WHICH THE SOCIALISTS HAVE WORKED LONG AND HARD TO INGRAIN INTO THE FRENCH POLITICAL CLIMATE. SOME FRENCH SOCIALISTS SUGGEST THAT THE ITALIAN COMMUNISTS ARE A RATHER REASSURING LOT (AT LEAST AS THEY ARE VIEWED

NOTE BY OC/T: #AS RECEIVED.

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BY MOST FRENCH VOTERS) -- ASSOCIATION WITH THE PCI
CONFERS A KIND OF LEGITIMACY ON THE PCF WHICH IT MIGHT
NOT OTHERWISE HAVE (SEE PARIS 16488 OF JUNE 4, 1976).
FINALLY, MARCHAIS MAY BE SEEKING TO SHOW AN IMAGE OF
LESS-THAN-BLIND OPPOSITION TO EUROPE, BUILDING FURTHER
ON THE AIR OF SWEET REASON WHICH HAS CHARACTERIZED HIS
RECENT STATEMENTS ON ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIA-
MENT. ONE OBSERVER CALLS THIS NUANCE "THE DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN 'YES, IF' AND 'NO, BUT'."

4. POLLS, AUGURIES AND ENTRAILS: OVER THE PAST THREE
WEEKS PARIS JOURNALISTS AND POLITICAL EXPERTS HAVE BEEN
TALKING ABOUT THE LID WHICH THE GOF HAS CLAMPED ON THE
VARIOUS POLLING BODIES IN THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR.
CURRENT GUESSING, BASED ON A VERY FEW LEAKS, SUGGESTS
THAT MINISTRY POLLS GIVE THE UNITED LEFT BETWEEN 54 AND
56 PERCENT; THESE FIGURES ARE POSSIBLY CONFIRMED BY
THE MAY 4 PUBLICATION OF AN AURORE/PUBLIMETRIE POLL
WHICH GIVES THE LEFT 56 PERCENT IF ELECTIONS WERE HELD
TODAY. THESE FIGURES ARE NOT TRUSTWORTHY; PUBLIMETRIE
POLLS ARE OFTEN INACCURATE; MORE THAN NINE MONTHS
SEPARATE US FROM THE ELECTIONS -- ALL OF THESE THINGS
ARE TRUE. BUT THE FACT THAT THE UNITED LEFT APPEARS TO
BE ON THE RISE, THE FACT THAT ALL THE POLLS, FROM THE
MOST TRUSTWORTHY TO THE MOST FLY-BY-NIGHT, GIVE THE
UNITED LEFT SOMETHING MORE THAN 50 PERCENT OF VOTER
INTENTIONS AND THE FACT THAT THE MARGIN APPEARS TO BE
INCREASING -- ALL OF THESE POLITICAL FACTS APPEAR TO
BE CONTRIBUTING TO A CERTAIN FEELING THAT FRANCE IS
WAITING FOR THE ELECTIONS, THAT POLITICS WILL INCREA-
SINGLY BE UNPREDICTABLE UNTIL THE ELECTIONS AND THAT
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THE OTHER SHOE HAS YET TO DROP. MAJORITY OBSERVERS APPEAR TO HAVE REACHED THE SAME CONCLUSION, AT LEAST WITHIN THE RPR (SEE PARIS 12700) AND WHILE THE BLOCKAGE IS FAR FROM COMPLETE, THERE ARE SIGNS THAT THINGS ARE GETTING TOUGHER:

- ON THE HEELS OF APRIL'S DEMONSTRATIONS, STRIKES AND JOB ACTIONS, THE CGT/CFDT ALLIANCE ANNOUNCED THAT IT WOULD HAVE THE SUPPORT OF THE PRESTIGIOUS NATIONAL FEDERATION OF EDUCATION (FEN) IN THE EVENT OF NATIONAL STRIKES OF LATE MAY/EARLY JUNE (READ: IF THE GOF FAILS TO NEGOTIATE DURING THE NEXT THREE WEEKS);
- THE GOF APPEARS TO HAVE DISCREETLY SHELVED ANY IMMEDIATE PLANS FOR BRINGING THE ISSUES OF DIRECT ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND ELECTORAL REFORM (PARIS 11956) TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY;
- THE FALL SENATORIAL ELECTIONS COULD PRODUCE A LEFT MAJORITY IN THE SENATE -- IF SO, CHANGING THE CONSTITUTION BECOMES SOMETHING WELL WITHIN THE POWER OF A FUTURE LEFT GOVERNMENT.

5. THE MAJORITY -- AFTER YOU'VE SAID IT ALL, WHAT IS THERE RIGHT TO SAY?: THE UNEASY ALLIANCE AMONG MAJORITY PARTIES FURTHER DETERIORATED DURING THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES OVER BARRE PLAN "BIS" MEASURES. GAULLISTS ATTACKED THE PRIME MINISTER'S PROGRAM AND VERY NEARLY BROUGHT DOWN THE GOVERNMENT. EVEN THE CENTER PARTIES, TO DATE THE MOST LOYAL SUPPORTERS OF GISCARD, HAVE BEGUN TO DISTANCE THEMSELVES FROM THE PRESIDENT AND, TO A LESSER EXTENT, THE PM'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC REFORM PACKAGE. THE VERBAL STORM SURROUNDING PRIME MINISTER BARRE'S PRESENTATION OF HIS GOVERNMENT'S "TWELVE MONTH ACTION PLAN (SEE PARIS 12700) IS CALMING DOWN, AT LEAST AS FAR AS THE TV-WATCHING PUBLIC IS CONCERNED. THERE ARE EVEN SIGNS THAT IT MAY BE REACHING SOME KIND OF UNEASY MODUS CONFIDENTIAL

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VIVENDI. BARRE HAS INVITED RPR LEADER JACQUES CHIRAC TO LUNCH AT THE MATIGNON ON MAY 6. THE NEW RI HEAD JEAN-PIERRE SOISSON AND RI ASSEMBLY LEADER ROGER CHIRAC BOTH HAVE PUBLICLY EXPRESSED THEIR WILLINGNESS TO MEET WITH RPR LEADERS. WHILE THERE ARE DOUBTS ON BOTH SIDES THAT THESE MEN WILL BE ABLE TO REACH ANY KIND OF POLITICAL ACCORD, BOTH ARE AWARE OF CERTAIN TRUISMS: BARRE WILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO GOVERN WITHOUT CHIRAC'S COOPERATION; CHIRAC, IN THE LAST ANALYSIS, KNOWS THAT NOW IS NOT THE MOMENT TO BRING DOWN THE GOVERNMENT (LARGELY BECAUSE THE RPR WOULD NOT BE THE BIG WINNER IN EARLY ELECTIONS); THE PRESIDENT, TAKING A LEGALISTIC

VIEW OF THE ASSEMBLY'S VOTE OF CONFIDENCE, TOLD THE
NATION ON APRIL 29 THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN APPROVED,
NOT PARTIALLY APPROVED, NOT APPROVED WITH CAVEATS, BUT
THAT IT HAD IN FACT RECEIVED A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE FOR
ITS PROGRAM. AND THEREIN LIES THE DRAMA OF THE SITUATION:

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MOST POLITICIANS BELIEVE THAT BARRE'S SECOND PLAN ("BARRE-BIS") IS TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE. THEY DO NOT BELIEVE THAT IT WILL PULL FRANCE'S UNEMPLOYMENT INTO LINE WITH WHAT A GOVERNMENT WITH SERIOUS CHANCES OF ELECTORAL VICTORY REQUIRES. IN TURN, WHEN GISCARD ANNOUNCED THAT HE SAW NO REASON TO HOLD EARLY ELECTIONS, THE MAJORITY, CONSIDERED AS A WHOLE, WAS IN ONE RESPECT OBLIGED TO COMMIT ITS POLITICAL FORTUNES TO THE RESULTS OF BARRE-BIS. IN THAT DECISION THE RPR SEES LITTLE CAUSE FOR POLITICAL OPTIMISM.

6. APRIL IN PARIS: SPRING FINALLY COMES TO PARIS AFTER A LONG GREY WINTER. IT BROUGHT THE USUAL PHENOMENA -- TOURISTS GINGERLY PICKING THEIR WAY AROUND PILES OF GARBAGE LEFT AS A RESULT OF THE FIRST TEST OF JACQUES CHIRAC'S POLITICAL WILL IN HIS NEW ROLE AS MAYOR OF PARIS (A GARBAGEWORKERS' STRIKE); POSTERS FOR THE PCF'S SPRING FESTIVAL; THE ANNUAL PARIS FAIR -- AND A FEW WHICH WERE NEW THIS YEAR. THE NEW POMPIDOU CULTURAL CENTER CONTINUES TO DRAW HUGE CROWDS OF STROLLERS WHO HAVE BROUGHT LIFE TO A PART OF PARIS' CENTRAL MARKET DISTRICT WHICH HAD BEEN MORIBUND FOR YEARS. AFTER WEEKS OF INDECISION BROUGHT ON BY A RIFT BETWEEN CHIRAC AND MINISTER OF CULTURE D'ORNANO THE CITY ANNOUNCED PLANS FOR A GIANT CULTURAL FESTIVAL. YET EVERYWHERE YOU GO THERE IS A FEELING THAT TROUBLE IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER. PROFESSORS AND TEACHERS ALL OVER FRANCE HAVE SUDDENLY REALIZED THAT APPLICATION OF THE HABY EDUCATION REFORM BILL WILL DOUBLE THE SIZE OF THEIR CLASSES NEXT YEAR; STUDENTS, TIRED OF BEING TOLD THAT THEIR ROLE IS ESSENTIALLY A-POLITICAL, HAVE ANNOUNCED PLANS TO REFORM
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THE GRAND COALITION WHICH WAS ONCE THE MOVEMENT CALLED RENOUVEAU; BORDEAUX AND TOULOUSE HAVE BOTH SEEN A SHARP RISE IN POLITICAL AGITATION IN UNEXPECTED QUARTERS. AND, WHILE THIS MAY HAVE BEEN TRUE OF MANY FRENCH

SPRINGTIMES IN THE PAST, NO ONE IS SAYING THAT THE SUMMER WILL ALLOW PASSIONS TO COOL AND PROBLEMS TO DISSIPATE THEMSELVES. THE PROGNOSIS, AT LEAST IN THE SHORT TERM, IS FOR A RISING TIDE OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ACTIVITY WHICH WILL NOT BE QUELLED BY ANYTHING SHORT OF ELECTIONS. AND THEY'RE STILL A LONG TIME AWAY -- UNFORTUNATELY FOR THE PEACE OF MIND OF EVEN MAJORITY VOTERS. GAMMON

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